

**GLOBAL FEMINISMS
COMPARATIVE CASE STUDIES OF
WOMEN'S AND GENDER ACTIVISM
AND SCHOLARSHIP**

SITE: TANZANIA

**Transcript of Marjorie Mbilinyi
Interviewer: Anneth E. Meena**

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Marjorie Mbilinyi was born in New York 1943 and became a Tanzanian citizen in 1967. She is a gender activist, scholar and feminist committed to the promotion of gender equity and social justice through policy analysis, writing, organising and mentoring. She is a co-founder of several feminist organizations and activist networks in Tanzania and Africa, including the Feminist Activist Coalition, and Gender and Economic Reforms in Africa, (GERA) Accra, HakiElimu; Women Dignity; Tanzania Participatory Research Network and African Participatory Research Networks; and she was the co-founder and first convenor and director respectively of Women's Research and Documentation Project (WRDP) and Tanzania Gender Network Programme (TGNP) (1994-1996). (1994-96). She later re-joined TGNP in 2004 -2014 and became the Principal Policy Analyst, taking an active role in providing conceptual leadership for transformative feminist movement building, participatory gender budget processes and participatory action research at grassroots and national levels. Mbilinyi taught at the University of Dar es Salaam from 1968 to 2003 for thirty-five years (1968 to 2003) in the Department of Education (1968-1980) and Institute of Development Studies (1980-2003), and was the first Tanzanian woman to achieve her Doctorate (1973) and to become a full Professor (1980). She introduced gender and feminist studies and participatory pedagogy and research methodology in graduate and undergraduate courses, through supervision of independent research theses at MA and PHD level, and numerous writings and research. In the early 1980s she supported various women groups: formal and informal and movement to provide with conceptual clarity on feminism concept and ideology.

Mbilinyi is co-editor of *Nyerere on Education* (co-editor with Elieshi Lema, Rakesh Rajani; 2004); *Activist Voices: Feminist Struggles for an Alternative World* (co-editor with Mary Rusimbi, Chachage S L Chachage and Demere Kitunga, 2003); *Against Neoliberalism: Gender, Democracy & Development* (co-editor Chachage S L Chachage, 2003). Recent journal articles include "Debating Land and Agrarian Issues from a Gender Perspective" *Agrarian South: Journal of Political Economy* 5(2-3) 1-23 [2017]; "Analysing the history of agrarian struggles in Tanzania from a feminist perspective" *Review of African Political Economy* 43 (S1) September [2016] and book chapters "Transformative Feminism in Tanzania: Animation and Grassroots Women's Struggles For Land and Livelihoods" in *Oxford Handbook of Transnational Feminist Movements: Knowledge, Power and Social Change* 2015, eds Rawida Baksh and Wendy Harcourt, Oxford University Press; (co-author Gloria Shechambo) "Experiences in Transformative Feminist Movement Building at the Grassroots Level in Tanzania" in *Transatlantic Feminisms: Women and Gender Studies in Africa and the African Diaspora* eds Akosua Adomako Ampofo, Cheryl R Rodriguez & Dzodzi Tsikata, Lexington, 2015. She served on various boards including TGNP, Women Dignity & HakiElimu. She studied at Cornell University (BSc Child Development); Stanford University (MA Ed) and University of Dar es Salaam (PhD).

Anneth E. Meena was born in Coast Region in 1971, and is an activist, researcher and feminist. She is an independent consultant in Environment, Health and gender issues. She is passionate about women rights. She has worked in several organizations holding various positions e.g. Monitoring and Evaluation coordinator for World Vision, Arusha (2000); and Project Coordinator for Forum for African Women Educationalist on Centre of Excellence school in Tanzania as a model for gender responsive curriculum and pedagogy (2001 -

2002). She pioneered the establishment of a family social enterprise and became the first school manager and later first principal (2007- 2017). She has worked as an Independent consultant with various Women Rights Organizations including TGNP Mtandao; Women Fund Tanzania Trust (WFT-T); Readership for Learning and Development (Soma). Meena has been involved in documenting women stories through TGNP Mtandao, WFT-T, Soma and currently with University of Michigan. She is a member of various coalitions including sextortion, women leadership and constitution.

Meena has had various academic awards such as ‘The Hammad Prize Award’ in recognition of exceptional written work on an international topic, 2005 with Wagner School of Public Services, New York University, New York, USA. She was one of the two recipients of an Oprah Winfrey Scholarship as a graduate at the New York University (2004 to 2005). She was a Ford Foundation Fellow (2003) with International Centre for Research on Women Washington, DC, USA. In 1999 she received small grant Research Award from Council for the Development of Social Science Research.

She holds an undergraduate degree on Environmental and Geographical Sciences from University of Cape Town, South Africa (1996); Masters of Demography from University of Dar es salaam, Tanzania (2000) and a Masters of Science in Management for Public Services from the New York University, USA (2005).

Keywords: Art/Writing as Activism, Education, and Intersectionality

Anneth Meena: Today we were going to spend at least one hour talking about five broad topics: general background about your life and work, your reflection on your work, your thoughts about the relationship between feminism, scholarship, and activism, and how you see your work in relation to these practices. Your thought and insight about your work in the context of broadly conceived notion of women movement, and finally the connection you see if any between your work and those of activists in other national settings. So if we start,--we are starting with your background, about your life. As you think about where you are today – Okay.

How would you see the journey that brought you to this point? That is, what are the central commitments in your life, what does your career look like, what do you consider your most significant lifetime achievement professionally?

Marjorie Mbilinyi: My central commitment, I think, is I'm passionate about issues of equity, equality, social justice, and in particular issues having related to gender inequality and equity. But I don't see it only as a gender issue, and that's why we developed the whole concept of transformative feminism to insist on: we have to ground issues of gender in the relationship to class, neoliberal globalization, race, etc. And it depends also on the context in terms of how these relations intersect.

And so I think I've been very fortunate that, well, first of all, if I say how I came to this of course part of it is my own childhood where I had quite a lot of struggles and felt very angry and felt the world is unjust, how do we change it? And later I was exposed to literature that helped me to name what it is we are talking about. As a young person in the states I got involved in the civil rights movement, so when I came to Tanzania it was this kind of continuity between struggles then over issues of racial discrimination, which I saw as an issue in and of itself but related it to class, and then connecting that as I came to Tanzania, became a wife and mother, suffered sex discrimination at the university connected to gender. I must say that I [unclear] from the literature as well, you know, sometimes you think it is just you yourself and if your spouse starts telling you no its one thing when you are together in the United States, fellow students, everything is great, when you come home and you are situated in a very patriarchal society, you can be told no these are American ideas, you know, you have to get used to how things are in Tanzania. Reaching out to the fellow women and finding out no, this is an issue for all of us, and then when I began to teach at the university, beginning to, and finding similar types of struggle over patriarchy at the university, we began to read the literature together in groups, study groups, and I learned to put a name to a lot of these issues and recognize as so many people have, this is not just an individual problem, a personal problem, it is not just ones husband or father or brother or what, this has to do really with social structures and systems that we can change. That's the other thing, I think many women feel like this is how it is, that it can't be changed, and so I became very committed to history as well, learning again from the work that others have done, and recognizing for example in Tanzania, in Africa, what people call tradition and culture is not necessarily tradition. Its what the colonial authorities invented, talking to male chiefs, and called tradition, but in fact you can find that in the past women had a great deal more power in many societies. I don't want to romanticize, but definitely there is not one tradition and culture and we know now how

different actors will use and manipulate the concept of tradition in order to keep women down. And so I think that's where some of us get together and say let's do new history about social relations of gender and patriarchy, class, etc, from the past and discover what were those revisions and how did they change during the colonial period and so on? Okay one of the things that we also learned, because I can say that I, who am I? If I say who am I? I'm an educator, an activist, a researcher, a writer, a wife, mother, grandmother, and I was fortunate to be employed at the university in the early days, the sixties, when it was a very exciting moment, where there was a lot of discussion, mostly on the left, social movements, Marxism and so on, but it meant it was a progressive moment, although very intolerant of any form of women's rights and patriarchy, I mean feminism, so those of us who raised the issues were bashed. "You are defying the masses," but we learned in order to fight this kind of patriarchy at the university, as well as outside of society, you can't do it alone. I used to write poetry, remember, when I faced really discrimination in my first appointment on a temporary basis, whereas anybody else with a masters degree from Tanzania was hired as a full lecturer etc. I circulated a poem called "sex discrimination at the hill," something like that. In those days we used cycle style paper, it was blue. Women students helped me to circulate it in hall 3, in those days is where the female students stayed. What can you do? Eventually it got published in the daily, whatever was the English newspaper at that time. But you know, one person, you can be easily isolated. All the women in administration and academic, it was exciting because, it wasn't just Tanzanians, there were many Tanzanians employed in the late sixties at the university, so anyway we learned, or I learned, to breath [unclear] late sixties and seventies bashed it as a Western concept, I think they wanted to label it as lesbian and all the rest, which, in order to invalidate, to stigmatize what we were doing. So feminists would call ourselves gender activists, but we were feminists in terms of what we were trying to do.

So we started the idea of a study group, then we wanted to not just read what other people wrote about feminism or gender, male dominance, outside at the beginning and then work that [unclear] we could do it ourselves. Mind you the idea of a feminist study group was, many people were not from the university, so we were actually mutual learning kind of a group. We decided let's do our own research, we started writing research proposals connected to this and so on, and when we succeeded through Ford Foundation to get a grant,¹ the heads, the directors of IDS said no this resource is going to belong to the IDS,² we decide in the research publication committee how it would be used. And we as, especially those of us who were academics at the university were shocked. You mean to say that the way village governance sees women's projects in the village can happen at the University of Dar es Salaam?³ And we fought back, we were thirty people by then, we stood

¹ The Ford Foundation is an American private foundation working to advance human welfare. ("Ford Foundation." Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ford_Foundation. Accessed 18 May 2022.)

² IDS stands for the Institute of Development Studies, a think tank affiliated with the University of Sussex in Brighton, England, and delivers research and teaching in developmental studies. ("Institute of Development Studies." Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Institute_of_Development_Studies. Accessed 18 May 2022.)

³ University of Dar es Salaam is a public university in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. The university was established in 1961 and became an affiliate of the University of East Africa in 1963. ("University of Dar es Salaam." <https://socialprotection.org/connect/stakeholders/university-dar-es-salaam>. Accessed 17 February 2022.)

up to the directors, [unclear] some of them were, and are, very close friends, and said sorry, we don't accept, and we found support outside, including Ford Foundation themselves, and said keep your money first until we recreate ourselves, we created and registered as the Women Research and Documentation Project, so that's how the WRDP began.⁴ It began a struggle. For the first ten years of its life, you can say it was a breath of fresh air, it was doing critical, exciting work. And then along came preparations for Beijing, and I was approached with others to prepare for Beijing, to work with other organizations.⁵ We held three meetings, '92, '93, we created what we called the facilitators committee or something like that, and I was like the coordinator, and that gave birth to TGNP.⁶ I'm only raising this, I go back again, to my life and my career, because there is a question about your career, I don't see an easy separation between scholarship, academia, and activism. We as academics had to organize ourselves to defend our rights as women academics, or as women in Tanzanian society, or the global society. At the same time I had the kind of courses, and I used the opportunity to shape them, which would allow me to introduce students first at the department of education, and then at IDS, Institute of Development Studies, to analysis of gender as it relates to class, race, neoliberal globalization. Especially at the graduate level, I was fortunate to become coordinator of postgraduate studies in education, then I was invited to join IDS, the same time as I became a full professor. I used that opportunity to start a [unclear] and then the research methodology and foundational courses as well, exposing candidates to issues pertaining [unclear] last of the struggle against imperialism and all the rest, but connecting that to issues of patriarchy. So, right, as well as teach, and I was able to do the kind of, my PhD research, it's interesting because the idea of doing work on access to education for girls or women, which was the theme of my PhD, came from the Ministry of Education.⁷ As a research assist – researcher in the department of education, we were all invited to go to the Ministry of Education and I asked them what are the key issues you want me to study? And they said we have two issues. And one is why parents are not educating their girls? And secondly is pregnant schoolgirls. The issue of pregnant schoolgirls is a bit complicated; I think it's, I'm not ready yet for that. I'm not rooted enough to do that kind of research. But the issue of access is something that

⁴ The Women's Research and Documentation Project (WRDP) began as a study group in the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) in 1980, and became an independent group promoting the study and research of "The Women's Question" in Tanzania. ("Women's Research and Documentation Project (Tanzania)." <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3174577>. Accessed on 25 May 2022.)

⁵ Beijing refers to the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995. This conference resulted in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, a declaration that advocated for the advancement of the women's movement. ("The Beijing Platform for Action: inspiration then and now." UN Women-United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women. <https://beijing20.unwomen.org/en/about>. Accessed 12 March 2022.)

⁶ TGNP stands for the Tanzania Gender Networking Programme, formed in 1993 as an activist non-profit organization in order to facilitate the transformative feminist movement. ("Our History." Tanzania Gender Networking Programme. <https://tgnp.or.tz/who-we-are/our-history/>. Accessed 20 June 2022.)

⁷ Tanzania's Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Vocational Training is the sector of the federal government responsible for these areas of industry and education. ("Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Vocational Training." Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ministry_of_Education,_Science,_Technology_and_Vocational_Training. Accessed 20 June 2022.)

relates to the kind of research I was doing as a young person in the states. So that became the theme of my PhD. Another interesting thing about that is the only time I did kind of survey research where I employed student researchers to go out and do interviews, after that I've always been a participant in the kind of work I've done. It's mostly been participatory research, some of it has been historical, writing life histories of people, but much of it is really participatory action research, which means you combine analysis and research with connecting with people that you're working with, working with them to analyze the situation, prioritize, make changes happen, so you see there's a flow, in terms of connecting analysis, which I firmly believe we must strengthen our analysis, the use of the literature and so on, we have to be very well informed when we go and work wherever we are going to work, impressions we leave with people, connecting that to some form of activism.

As I've been saying, of education, I love teaching, I really do love teaching. [unclear] in a way. I felt as if even MA candidates were there to get a degree in a higher [unclear] you know what I mean, it started changing by 2003, compared to the atmosphere of really wanting to learn and exciting debates that used to be there. But I often did regret later that I wasn't still [unclear]. Luckily I was able to go back, having been the first, I was called coordinator, but director of TGNP in the late 90s, I came back as a principal research analyst or something like that for ten years, 2004, 2014, and retired in 2014. So that was very exciting. And then I analyzed the bit about my writing because I love to teach, I also love to write. I love to talk to people, so I love to do research as well. And I really was a prolific writer as a young person, although much of it was never published. You know, if I write something in a, and somebody says can I put that in my book or journal article, sure, but if people start saying "oh you have to change this or change that" I kind of get bored. But if anybody says "Marge can you present a paper in Morogoro⁸ and the Sokoine University of Agriculture,"⁹ sure, or "will you give a paper at the learning session of HakiElimu, sure,¹⁰ because it's the social interaction that I like, because it's also what a teacher knows in the classroom, so my list of presentations is much longer than publications, but I do have, I don't know maybe 21 books or reports I've edited or as myself [unclear, cuts] coedited, coauthored myself and then many articles.

Yeah, most significant lifetime achievements. Well, you know it's hard for a person to assess themselves, and sometimes I think in Tanzania especially most women we don't do enough of, in a sense, praising ourselves, we wait until someone is dying or dead and then we start praising them, not just women, I think it's something about our society. I remember when we attended a meeting in Nairobi, in the early days, early '70s, and somebody stood up and said "this is our professor, this is our PhD, this is this," and people

⁸ Morogoro is city in east Tanzania, roughly 100 miles from the city of Dar es Salaam. ("Morogoro." Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Morogoro>. Accessed 20 June 2022.)

⁹ The Sokoine University of Agriculture is a public university in Morogoro, Tanzania. It was established in 1984. ("Sokoine University of Agriculture." Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sokoine_University_of_Agriculture. Accessed 20 June 2022.)

¹⁰ HakiElimu is a non-profit org that promotes access to education in Tanzania. Its members are distinguished educators, policy makers, and activists. ("Our Roots." HakiElimu. <https://www.hakielimu.or.tz/our-roots-2/>. Accessed 20 June 2022.)

from Tanzania said “oh we have those,” but they never thought of talking about it.¹¹ You know what I mean.

AM: Yeah I do.

MM: Or we have a writer, we have a poet, kind of praising ourselves. But if I know look back, so if you asked me twenty years ago it might be different, but if I look back now I would say extremely important achievements now has been mentoring younger or so called junior scholars, as activists, in the university but also outside, because when I retired researchers would come and look for me at TGNP and share their work and so on. Other people write to us, I’m sure this happens to you as well, and ask for comments on a proposal, or an article, or advice on how to go about their work and so on and so on, all of that I consider mentoring. Sometimes we mentor and we don’t know it, when you’re working together with people and you’re not, you’re not, consciously think about it. My granddaughters, my two granddaughters graduated from the University and now they’re ... It’s a formal mentoring, will you be my mentor? [laughs] But you know at the University of Dar es Salaam I think it hardly ever happened that way. It’s just that people kind of get involved with what you’re doing, you find them associating with you, and somehow you end up reaching out and supporting what they’re doing, may become close friends, you may do things together, and so on. Another I think lifetime achievement is just educating so many people, in Tanzania and wherever you go, “hey mwalimu!”¹² I even, my first teaching job was at Rosary Secondary School, now I’m gone and I can still meet a graduate of that secondary school. And you know its wonderful [laughs] when you realize how many people have been associated with you in that way, and you know, teachers learn from their students, its not just a one way flow. I think, the research that I’ve done, is a good achievement, especially I think the most exciting was the ‘haki ya chakula, ardhi na demokrasia’ work,¹³ that led to a campaign on the right to food, land and democracy, it was very exciting, it was really grounded locally, it really was participatory [unclear] where the grassroots activists were very much a part of the whole process, and took control of it, and led to a major campaign [but] but very few people, it’s just how, we had partners who supported us, including Soma,¹⁴ and so on, so that we could get our message out to many people [unclear] having inspired other people, because people say “ah you’re Marjorie Mbilinyi I’ve been reading your work,” or “that article you wrote is very important to me,” and some of the people who say this are people who I respect so much, including the kind of African feminist group in the diaspora as well as on the continent, so you don’t even know sometimes that not just your presence but the writing is like that, and I know from my own experience having been so inspired by the writings that I have done, and I guess if I would conclude here, I think we need to continue putting a lot of attention, because there’s

¹¹ Nairobi is the capital of Kenya and the biggest city in the country, with over four million residents. (“Nairobi.” Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nairobi>. Accessed 20 June 2022.)

¹² “Mwalimu” means “teacher” in Swahili. (“mwalimu in English.” bab.la. <https://en.bab.la/dictionary/swahili-english/mwalimu>. Accessed 20 June 2022.)

¹³ ‘Haki y achakula, ardhi na demokrasia work’ in Swahili translates to ‘the right to food, land, and democracy research project.’

¹⁴ Soma refers to the non-profit E&D Readership and Development Agency – Soma. (“Demere Kituga.” LinkedIn. <https://www.linkedin.com/in/demere-kitunga-49b98123/?originalSubdomain=tz>. Accessed 20 June 2022.)

so much social media stuff and all that, on writing. On getting a message out, and I still believe in books, printed books, that people can hold. You know when Media Kiyasha would do everything in Kiswahili,¹⁵ and villages would devour these materials, they would finance, photocopy them, to take them to other villages. So I believe the written material still has a transformative role in communication. Thank you.

AM: Thank you, dada Marge. Yeah I think you've touched the relationship between feminism, scholarship and activism, that you've mentioned already. So we can move on to the intersection of your work with the women's movement in the country and globally.

MM: Maybe I could say one point.

AM: Okay.

MM: There's a question that has, how have things changed over time, and I remember making that point that the university we're encouraged to write, of course I [unclear] formal letter from the administration [unclear] at that time, chief academic posts maybe in the, it was funny, because I was writing about [unclear] I was writing about education and history and so on, but because it was connected to a gender analysis they were saying it was the same thing. So I think at that time people hadn't really recognized the fact that gender analysis is in itself is a field of study, that feminism is a field of study, I think we've gone beyond that. But when I, saw a lot of my work was also my own individual, as well as connective, when I joined TGNP you can see a drop of my publications. It's much more connective. It's also very exciting because when you write, you write an article on behalf of the organization for the newspaper, and we were writing those every week, either it's in the name of the director or it's in the name of the organization, but it reaches many more people, and if you do presentations, you are talking to many more people, but it means you are not yourself getting your work published, and something, and so on. And I think as a writer, sometimes we also like to have our name attached to things somehow. Something about, or maybe it's simply the art and craft of writing, when you're on the go everyday, somethings happening, and you're writing something, it's a different kind of writing. I think its very, it can be very influential, but it's a different kind of writing. And recently I was fortunate to be invited to participate in a project run by, it's called the Oxford Encyclopedia of African History,¹⁶ and within that there's gonna be a book edited by Dorothy Hodgson and other colleagues on African women's history,¹⁷ and they wanted me to write a chapter on Tanzania women's history. It's taken me a long time, but I've managed funding, it's been submitted and it's been accepted, and I'm really happy, because it forced me to read new work, not only about Tanzania, women in Tanzania but elsewhere, and be up to date.

¹⁵ Kiswahili is the native name for Swahili, the language of the Swahili people native primarily to Tanzania. ("Swahili language." Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Swahili_language. Accessed on 2 June 2022.)

¹⁶ Access the Oxford Encyclopedia of African History here: <https://oxfordre.com/africanhistory>

¹⁷ Dorothy Hodgson is a dean and Professor of Anthropology at Brandeis University in Massachusetts, USA. ("Dorothy Hodgson." Brandeis Faculty Guide. <https://www.brandeis.edu/facultyguide/person.html?emplid=6bc29c6875e478831f254f92384c6c7f7b2eb814>. Accessed 20 June 2022.)

Because I was trying to recycle old writing that had never been published, and they said no, we want it up to date. But that was great, I learned a lot from that process, and it makes me realize that we need space as activists, so it's like saying if I was a scholar-activist for many years, then I was sort of more full time activist when I was working full time at TGNP, and now I'm a combination of everything but independent sort of writer, I think even when we're full time activists we need to invite people on their work, but also go out and learn, what is being written about, what is the analysis going on considering gender and Africa in 2021. What's happening around the world, what are the latest advances in feminist scholarship, because quite honestly we don't know, if you don't read you don't know, and [unclear] asked to participate in certain kinds of meetings. So I do think we need to invest more time in reflection and analysis, we don't have to go outside, but we need to have a break from everyday work. A place to be on your own and probably have some social contact to support what you are doing as well as financial support. So that's just one reflection. Yes, okay.

AM: Yeah, so we go to number five on our guideline, the intersection of your work in the country and globally. I'm sure you've mentioned that –

MM: Okay so which question is this?

AM: It's number five. Number five.

MM: Oh, number five. Okay. From the interview schedule with the women's movements – okay. Well, I had already started talking about it in the questions up above, but, um, of course my closest relationship has been, for the women's movement, has been TGNP. But I also mention Women's Research and Documentation Project, and also the Fem Act Coalition, Feminist Activist Coalition (FemAct)¹⁸, and also increasing working with the newer organization, Women Fund Tanzania,¹⁹ and from a distance looking at what was created and supported by the combination of WFT and TGNP which is women and constitution coalition. And I, I am on the one hand I would say my work has been a part of the movement, and I have been enriched by the movement as well as contributed to the movement. Recently I am doing another report looking at reports written by actors in that coalition when the [unclear] and then looking back at the work we did with the Fem Act, the Fem Act in the 90s and the early 2000s. I'm really proud of what we've achieved. And in spite of changes that have happened, in the 90s everyone was, in the 70s, 80s, especially in the early 90s, you could say that there was a general progressive community that was critical of neoliberal globalization, our first public meeting, open public meeting of TGNP was on gender and structural adjustment. And we got a junior, a deputy ministry, Honorable Kong, to be the guest speaker. She stayed for the whole day. You know what I

¹⁸ A coalition of feminist organizations initiated in the 1990s in Tanzania. ("Struggles Over Land Reform in Tanzania: Experiences of Tanzania Gender Networking Programme and Feminist Activist Coalition" by Marjorie Mbilinyi and Gloria Shechambo. https://feministafrica.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/fa12_profile_mbilinyi_shechambo.pdf/. Accessed 22 July 2024.)

¹⁹ The Women Fund Tanzania Trust (WFT) is an organization focused on distributing grants and resources to women's groups across the country. ("Who We Are: Our Work." Women Fund Tanzania Trust. <https://wft.or.tz/who-we-are/our-work-2/>. Accessed 20 June 2022.)

mean. It was something that many people, many women [unclear] being critical, who are these World Bank²⁰ and IMF²¹ to tell us what we are doing, we had a president then who was himself an inspiration, and the whole regime...well now, if you look back at that time and at the present, I think neoliberal ideology is much stronger. It has affected organizations. Also in those days an organization like TGNP and, development partners come to beg us, can we support your doing, and they were prepared to do what was called basket funding, you know, program funding, we would give them a five year time and they would give us a [unclear]. The whole world has changed, we can't pretend to be united, and there's much more project funding which means that the donor partner, in quotation marks, I think is more in the kitchen now, having more influence on what we do. And an organization might end up doing a project not because it's really a part of its own program, [unclear] priorities but its where a funder was prepared to make the funding and then what you do, what you do is to try to fit your own program into what that development partner wants. And I think that atmosphere, also I can sense if we look at gender festival, you know TGNP, we have the national gender festival, and every year we have the local gender festival, it's a wonderful gathering of thousands of people in most cases, from all over Tanzania and also neighboring countries. And in the old days, we would all openly critique critical mistakes of government, donor community, all the rest, whereas these days you see people saying shh, be careful, maybe we've invited the vice president to be the guest of honor or something. You can see what I'm saying, there's a change, where we're beginning to think our allies, our partners [unclear], I don't know how to put it, I can't say fellow activists, are high, and powerful women political elites or members of the governing class. This has changed from how it was before. But we also had, in order to try to influence support, to advocate our positions, whereas now its as if we want to be a part of that group, and by doing that I think, let me pose it as a question, have we lost our positionality and solidarity with the majority of women? Let me just pose it as a question. And I think it's a challenge for many of the organizations. Having said that, I remain very proud of what's being accomplished even today. We may all have differences but somehow, some of the organizations retain a sense that they have to speak out in support of popular issues, they have to be willing to be critical, and that's holding us together, I hope we can continue that essence of identifying with the majority of marginalized and so on.

AM: Okay, thank you. Number six. Connection to international forms of activism and scholarship.

MM: Right. And then it says my other organization, another group I want to mention along with, I have mentioned WFT, but another group I belong to and is more recent is an entirely different kind of organization called Hai Bozeni. We are a group of women who have all reached the age of sixty and above. I think I'm the oldest. Wonderful, I'm seventy-eight. And we're just a social support group, we just have fun. I remember at the beginning saying

²⁰ The World Bank is an international organization that assists countries with development projects and provides financial knowledge and products. ("What We Do." The World Bank. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/what-we-do>. Accessed 20 June 2022.)

²¹ The International Monetary Fund aims to foster economic growth, collaboratively and sustainably. It has 190 member countries. ("What is the IMF?" International Monetary Fund. <https://www.imf.org/en/About/Factsheets/IMF-at-a-Glance>. Accessed 20 June 2022.)

[unclear] now what we can do is lobby so that we can have spaces, community spaces for wazee (old people). One of the members said, Marge, this is about us, this is about us! About what we want and need and so on. Actually a lot of the time is spent having monthly lunches, hanging out together, at the same time we have a very active WhatsApp group so every day people are watching out and sharing things, including sharing the achievements they have had, or their kids have had, grandchildren have had, other friends.²² If we notice somebody is silent for a few days we reach out, hey so and so, are you okay, what's going on and all the rest. With Covid it hasn't been possible to meet as often as before.²³ That's really great, important that we have those kinds of interactions. I think some people get them through their church, or their mosque, there's a women's group they're a part of. May I mention another local group called Wakibo, which is Wanawake wa Kimara Baruti. It's a savings and loan association at my old neighborhood at Kimara Baraduchi corner. And, the leader of their group, Tumbo-Masabo, but there are many other women involved.²⁴ And that's another kind of association or organization that keeps me grounded sometimes. I'm just down [unclear] in the old days we would meet every week again but Covid plus my moving to Masaki it's not always possible, but I think you get the idea, there's lots of different organizations.²⁵ Now the international connections, I think again, beginning in the late 70s, 80s, 90s, when there were more and more conferences and meetings on gender issues, plus the meeting in Copenhagen was a first world's congress on women's rights,²⁶ that I attended, and then I was a part in Nairobi we organized a two WRDP, we organized the Tanzanian groups to go to Nairobi, I think that was 1980. TGNP became the key, a key facilitator of those who went to Beijing, although I didn't go to Beijing. But I've been fortunate to have been exposed through those kinds of meetings, making contacts with different networks and those do develop sometimes into rich friendships, whilst having a chance to share our work and my work in outside, and hear feedback from other people, learn what other people are doing, has been very exciting, and a lot of it is this kind of cross-section between academia scholarship, research on women, gender, as well as activism. Because I think for many feminists, you can't really say this is academic, this is activism, because they are connected. I think some are purely into academia, especially recently, more kind of liberal feminism, but I think a lot of people in the 90s, like the organization Dawn and Award and others, connected scholarship and insisting on the voice of African women to speak for ourselves, women in Africa, to do analysis, ourselves, situation and the history and so on, has been connected to development issues in our

²² WhatsApp is a social media platform that allows users to text and call contacts, as well as create group chats. ("WhatsApp." Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/WhatsApp>. Accessed 20 June 2022.)

²³ Since the Covid-19 pandemic reached Tanzania, there have been more than 35,000 reported cases. As of June 2022, approximately 7% of the population has been fully vaccinated. ("Tanzania." Reuters Covid-19 Tracker. <https://graphics.reuters.com/world-coronavirus-tracker-and-maps/countries-and-territories/tanzania/>. Accessed 20 June 2022.)

²⁴ Zubeida Tumbo-Masabo is a Tanzania activist, research, and author. ("Zubeida Tumbo-Masabo." Twitter. <https://twitter.com/tumbomas?lang=en>. Accessed 20 June 2022.)

²⁵ Masaki is an area of the Msasani region of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. It is located northwest of the region's business district. ("Msasani." Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Msasani>. Accessed 20 June 2022.)

²⁶ In 1980, feminist activists, scholars, and national leaders met in Copenhagen, Denmark for the second United Nations World Conference on Women. ("World Conference on Women." UN Women. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/how-we-work/intergovernmental-support/world-conferences-on-women#copenhagen>. Accessed 20 June 2022.)

societies. It was impossible to separate those two issues. There's another question that I somehow related to about connecting with a social movement and I know in some meetings it sounded like a weed, it became a big issue. How do we connect women's rights movements or feminist movement with social movements for change? And its interesting its often us having to reach out to them, I wish it was more the social movement people wanting to know how to reach out to the feminists and include them in their work, to recognize the fact that really, we provide a necessary ingredient in any social movement, because we connect the private and the public. We're not just interested in issues of class struggle and so on, but we connect it with the struggles in the home or struggles over the home. When our government says you cannot, made an overnight decision that pregnant schoolgirls could not re-enter school, they were intervening in a private issue of sexuality and reproduction [unclear] something in the name of tradition that was not traditional. So you can see in that, in fact the government has engaged in trying to govern and manage the private as well as the so-called public. And the social movement people have to get on board with that issue, like they can't just talk about struggles in the workplace, what about struggles in the community which supports workers or peasants in the workplace. I think you know where I'm headed here. I think transformative feminism does this, we combine our analysis of sexuality, reproduction, to our analysis of exploitation and oppression in the workplace, and for many people the workplace is not a factory or office, its doing home-based work, in the informal sector, in the city, or the town, or informal sector in peasant production, [unclear] social movements would change. There's a need to bring them together, and I remember when we first tried to analyze transformative feminism, we said our movement is the movement that will bring really revolutionary change, because we do combine struggles over the home, the community, the family, [unclear] the workplace, something together like that. Over to you!

AM: Thank you so much! I think, in a way we have like finished, unless you have any, you have something to add.

MM: I kind of started talking about, because at the beginning as I said there was more interacting on a kind of individual basis, people might have read my work and invited me to a meeting, we got involved. When I joined TGNP, especially when I went back in 2004 to 2014, I was often sent to participate in international, regional, within Africa meetings, as a representative of TGNP. And before that it was more on account of the kind of work that I was doing. And as I said, this kind of exposure, I learned a lot. But then there's a question about how do you make sense of differences and similarities. Can we look at that one there, differences and similarities, issues raised by activists, scholars, and organizations. There are differences, even within Tanzania there are differences as I mentioned, I think increasingly we can talk about state feminism, liberal, which is more or less working within the government structures as it is rather than trying to change them. Liberal feminism which more or less says that women have equal opportunity with men under existing neoliberal society, which means a few women will make it as successful entrepreneurs, majority won't, they'll be cheap labor. You could also see how the issues being raised by feminists including those who might consider themselves something like transformative feminists partly depends on their historical context, their location. One of the main issues for people are, some folks are really focused on issues of sexuality and reproductive rights,

for example I'm right now in Houston with my daughter,²⁷ and there's a big issue in Texas because the governor has, and the legislature have just made it practically impossible for a woman to get an abortion.²⁸ They've deliberately created regulations to make it impossible. And they are attacking legislature in the past that allowed the women's rights, cough, samahani, to abortion on any grounds, there was no need to justify it.²⁹ In Texas now in six weeks it also means that citizens now have the right to police women or people, somebody, Uber driver who takes a woman to a clinic for an abortion can also be [unclear]³⁰ You know it's, creating what people say is [unclear] attending the meetings in Nairobi, that was in 1980, that was in 1985, 1985. A big thing then in the West was what they called FGM, female genital mutilation. Women from Asia, Arab countries, Middle East... They fought back. Under development, or its land-grabbing or its women as cheap labor. These are our issues of priority today. [unclear] Oh no no this is a major issue, which we now we go and I think in Swahili it's different but female circumcision or something like that. And I remember the first time I went and I asked them what are your major issues? And they asked me aren't you interested in the issues of FGM? And I said no, I'm not necessarily, unless you're interested in that issue. And they said many researchers come and talk to us about that. [laughs] Now that was in, when was that, that was in late 90s, 98, 99, 2000, 2001, and these were Tanzanian researchers or activists, coming and imposing their ideas or priorities on young Masaai women.³¹ I asked them what are your priorities? We get beaten, tunapigwa sana.³² Now many times women are married, what people think of youth, young women in our societies, as we know, is it a third of girls under the age of 18 are already married, I think it is like a third. So when we say young women, we shouldn't think these are young unmarried women, they may be [unclear] and they said no, we get beat [unclear]. This is not jealousy, which is interesting because I think many of us think because if a man leaves then another age mate could come and be with one's wife, and we look upon it with the eyes as if the woman is disempowered and has no choice of a sexual partner, actually we may not see that the woman may have her own lovers and make her own choices there. They said well we get beaten if the calf is lost, or a cow has died. And that taught me so much, because again, we as researchers and activists need to be very careful not to impose what we think is priorities on other people, we need to listen. What adult education has taught me is creative listening, and it's something which is key, what we call *uragabishi* [unclear]. So I think that's a major challenge, is how to listen to other people and find out in terms of positionality and then be clear where you stand, are you in

²⁷ Houston is a city in southeast Texas, in southern US. It is one of the five most populous cities in the United States. ("Houston." Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Houston>. Accessed 20 June 2022.)

²⁸ The Texas Heartbeat Act became Texas, US law in September 2021. It is the most restrictive abortion bill the country. Its passing sparked protests across the United States. ("Texas Heartbeat Act." Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Texas_Heartbeat_Act. Accessed 20 June 2022.)

²⁹ 'Samahani' means 'excuse me' in Swahili. ("samahani in English." bab.la. <https://en.bab.la/dictionary/swahili-english/samahani>. Accessed 20 June 2022.)

³⁰ Uber is a ride-sharing service founded in the United States. ("About Us." Uber. <https://www.uber.com/us/en/about/>. Accessed 20 June 2022.)

³¹ The Masaai people are pastoralists who live in Tanzania and Kenya. ("The Masaai People." Masaai Association. <http://www.maasai-association.org/maasai.html>. Accessed 20 June 2022.)

³² "Tunapigwa sana" means "we are very beaten" in English. (Google Translate. <https://translate.google.com/?sl=auto&tl=en&text=Tunapigwa%20sana&op=translate&hl=en>. Accessed 20 June 2022.)

support of those who are most exploited and oppressed or are you actually identifying with the elites in a certain situation? Women are not the same. [unclear] We did that classical annotated bibliography of women in Tanzania, of myself [unclear] we began with that concept, women are not the same. So when liberal feminists say “women, unite” I don’t get it because we are not united, some of us are capitalist exploiters, some of us work for development partners who are finding ways to monopolize or dominate policymaking decisions, and others are truly trying to work with the mass movements at the local level, and I guess a challenge to all of us is where do we stand in those kind of arena of different choices. I’m going to take, I hope I came with my lozenges, what we call positionality, challenging ourselves. And TGNP used to talk about it a lot of times, and *uragabishi*, and it is in Swahili word that means participatory methods and animation [unclear] positionality, where do we situate ourselves in the context of ongoing struggles? Really concretely, because as we know when you are working on to, like I remember one of our intensive movement-building IBC programs in one area, I forget where it was, but I remember Anderson [unclear] at TGNP was one of the researchers. And that community learned that the Ministry of Water was passing by in a motorcade,³³ so they organized themselves, not the men but it was a priority issue for women to block the motorcade and they put up big posters, handwritten to say “*tulete maji*” bring us water. And they stopped that Minister and his motorcade and he’s surrounded by at least probably, a few. But they, he chose to listen, he didn’t choose to say “get rid of those villagers” or so on, he stopped and he listened, he said “what is this about” and they said “for five years they promised us water, we don’t have water, our women, mind you our women have to walk how many miles to get water” and he asked the engineer in the [unclear] what’s going on, why hasn’t their water been dealt with, and of course by stopping that way and getting media attention, and the villagers know how to get media attention, which then gets communicated in social media, it gets communicated on national TV and so on, and within a short time that village got [unclear] only about struggles about getting water or electricity in a maternity ward? I know that’s a big issue in many places and so on, I think we are doing much more than that through this animation work, our participatory action research work. People are learning their citizenship rights, they are learning not to be afraid of challenging local government, central government, and making demands. The same with when organizations like TGNP have been active in the gender responsive budgeting, working with communities to look at what the budget allocated for your local community, to track those resources. Did it go to our village, did it go to our schools, did it go to our health centers? It is not just an issue of practical needs, it is an engagement with the state, and it’s demanding participation from below by citizens. And especially women becoming a part of that process to emphasize what they believe to be the priorities. I think that’s exciting work that continues to be done through the kind of participatory action research that is going on. Just like creating knowledge centers, working with investigative journalists. The journalists can go to a district health officer and ask them “are we understanding such and such a ward, they have no electricity in their maternity ward?” Now if villages raise that issue, they can be silenced by that health, district health officer. When a journalist goes with a camera behind them,

³³ Tanzania’s Ministry of Water and Irrigation is led by Professor Makame Mnyaa Mbarawa as of June 2022. (“Ministry of Water and Irrigation.” Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ministry_of_Water_and_Irrigation. Accessed 20 June 2022.)

they're going to pay attention. And they're going to act, so that combination of doing this kind of participatory action research analysis, involving grassroots people, community activists, combining it with the media, and then reaching out, giving feedback to leaders of local and central government, has really succeeded in making change. [unclear] We might say then our previous government was not, was not open to dissent. Was not willing to accept [unclear] activists of different kinds, even writers, so people began to be quiet, and not to write publicly, speak publicly, as openly as before, and that affected, I think, again when I was talking before in changes in organizations, there's no doubt that that constriction of space for open discussion also affected our organizations, our activism, we had to find another language, to say what we wanted to say. But it didn't silence us, I think people found ways and continued to found ways, people used cartoons, they used comedy, social media couldn't be silenced, but now there's another opening I hope, that continues to provide space, and we need to take advantage of that space as feminist activists, and reach out, as they say broaden the envelope, and inspire young people, and be inspired by young people. I was just quoting that wonderful meeting we had with the general, undersecretary general who leads UN Women at United Nations. You know remember she had that meeting at TGNP, it was organized by TGNP and WFT, I forget the exact date, but just a couple of years ago. And the young feminists spoke out and said we need more space for young people, and some of these are very notable successful leaders of organizations, they're writers [unclear] They also made the point to ask young people, you old people, because we know about social media and IT communications, and you older folks don't.³⁴ So that's a very important point because I think for some of us who could think of ourselves as the pioneers of the women's movement in Tanzania we do have a bit of [unclear] in the movement as well as all the young people involved in community action. So maybe I end at that point, we have so much to learn. It's wonderful to be invited to speak as one of the pioneers or older people. Maybe another lifetime achievement I would say is not just me but the way in which we began organizing as scholar-activists and creating space for raising feminist issues, that was a major achievement which continues, but we also need to reach out and learn from young people. That to me is intergenerational transmission, not really teaching young people but also working with young people is what keeps us alive, keeps us younger and dynamic. How can you grow old when you're working with young people?

AM: For sure [laughs] good point. Yeah.

MM: Do you have any of your own questions?

AM: I don't really, I'm excited to hear what you're saying, I've always been, because it's like recalling like what we had, our last conversations. Okay Marge, I thank you so much for your time, I know you have a very busy schedule.

MM: Thank you, it's been a pleasure as always. And it's nice to be able to see you!

³⁴ IT stands for 'information technology'. ("Information Technology (IT)." TechTarget. <https://www.techtarget.com/searchdatacenter/definition/IT>. Accessed 20 June 2022.)